

7.0 Comments and Coordination

7.1 Scoping Process

An NOI for this project was published in the FR on November 28, 1997. A scoping packet was distributed to interested federal, state, and local public agencies (Appendix F). The purpose of the scoping packet was to inform agencies of the proposed project, identify potential environmental issues and concerns, and obtain input from agencies regarding potential impacts. A formal scoping meeting was not held.

The following agencies were mailed scoping packets:

Federal Agencies

National Park Service
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies

Illinois Department of Commerce and
Community Affairs
Illinois Commerce Commission
Illinois Department of Agriculture
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

County Agencies

Henderson County Farm Bureau
Henderson County Soil and Water Conservation
District
Warren County Farm Bureau
Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District
Warren/Henderson Cooperative Extension Service

Other Agencies

Monmouth Economic Development Committee
Western Illinois Regional Council

7.2 Agency Coordination

Coordination with applicable agencies has been ongoing throughout the planning process. In the early stages of the study, a project scoping summary packet was distributed to the resource and regulatory agencies to facilitate understanding of the project corridor and initiate discussions of agency issues (Appendix F). This coordination consisted of both written correspondence and periodic agency coordination meetings. Written correspondence from agencies is provided in Appendix B and includes letters from USACE, IDOA, IDNR, and IEPA in which each agency accepted their role as cooperating agencies. As cooperating agencies, USACE, IDOA, IDNR, and IEPA require that pertinent information be included within the EIS that allows each agency to discharge their NEPA responsibilities, specifically as they relate to alternatives, environmental consequences, and mitigation. Concerns expressed by these agencies have aided in a thorough identification of the issues and concerns associated with the proposed project.

NEPA and Section 404 compliance requirements were merged for the Route 34 project in accordance with "Concurrent NEPA/404 Processes for Transportation Projects in Illinois" (IDOT, 2000). Three concurrence points, established by the NEPA/404 Merger process, allows regulatory agencies to confirm that information is adequate and the project can proceed to the next stage of project development. These concurrence points are (1) Purpose and Need, (2) Alternatives to be Carried Forward, and (3) Selected Alternative. The first two concurrence points occurred as the result of the NEPA/404 merger meetings during the development of the DEIS. The third concurrence point will occur as a result of agency and public review and comment on the DEIS.

The first NEPA/404 merger meeting was held on September 29, 1997. With a minor revision, concurrence was given to the Purpose and Need. The second NEPA/404 merger meeting was held on September 25, 1998. There was concurrence on the alternatives to be carried forward as final alternatives for the proposed project. The third NEPA/404 merger meeting will occur after agency and public review and comment on the DEIS.

Three agricultural coordination meetings were held during the alternate development process. The first meeting occurred on March 25, 1997 at the Farm Bureau in Monmouth to discuss project progress and discuss potential issues and concerns with project corridor farmers. A second meeting was held with representatives of IDOA to discuss project status, the alternate evaluation process, and issues of concern related to the proposed U.S. Route 34 project. More specifically, the meeting addressed agricultural criteria used in the alternate evaluation process and potential effects to agricultural resources in the agricultural resources in the project corridor. The third meeting was held in April 1999 to discuss the development and evaluation of final alternates and potential effects of proposed alternates on agriculture.

7.3 Public Involvement

Engaging the affected communities and soliciting their input was a key component to the location study process for U.S. Route 34. A Public Involvement Plan dated July 5, 1996 was prepared for the project and outlined the planned methods of communication and use of outreach tools. A wide variety of methods and techniques were used to solicit input and to inform the public of the project including public meetings, establishment of a U.S. Route 34 Focus Group, small group meetings with business owners and special interest groups, newsletters, questionnaires, and information availability sessions.

Overall, there is widespread support for the project from elected officials, community leaders, and the general public. A majority of those that have become involved in the planning project indicated that there is a definite need for a four-lane roadway for safety and efficiency reasons. The following is a summary of public involvement activities.

7.3.1 Public Questionnaire

A public opinion survey was developed for the project at the beginning of the study. This questionnaire (Appendix G) was used to solicit input from the local community and find out what they felt were important issues to consider during the study. Surveys were distributed throughout the corridor at retail outlets, libraries, post offices, and city halls. Approximately 153 surveys were returned.

The most significant issues identified by the public included traffic, farmland impacts, and business and industrial development. Problems with the existing roadway were identified as safety, truck traffic, and congestion.

7.3.2 S. Route 34 Focus Group

In order to assist in sharing information, and receiving input from members of the public, a U.S. Route 34 Focus Group was established at the onset of the location study. The group was formed to represent various entities of citizenry, all having a strong interest in the U.S. Route 34 project.

The group consisted of elected and community leaders (i.e., chamber of commerce members), and affected interests such as the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Union Community School District. The primary purpose of the Focus Group was to share information at periodic meetings throughout the phase I study of U.S. Route 34. A total of 6 meetings took place. A brief summary of each is as follows:

- July 25, 1996--Introduced the project team, the purpose of the Focus Group, and the goal of the Phase I study for U.S. Route 34 from Gulfport to Monmouth.
- August 27, 1996--Discussions included the upcoming public meeting, the proposed additions/deletions to the 1970 approved project corridor, the criteria for evaluating a freeway or expressway, and the environmental evaluation criteria for developing and evaluating alternatives.
- April 10, 1997--Primary purpose of this meeting was to present the recommendation for dropping the concept of a southeast bypass of Monmouth, and continuing with concepts to upgrade the existing northwest expressway. A recommendation to carry forward an expressway concept, not a freeway concept, from U.S. Route 67 west to Gulfport was also discussed.
- November 12, 1997--Preliminary alternatives were presented to the group from U.S. Route 67 to Gulfport. Some alternatives had been recommended for elimination from consideration due to environmental impacts and engineering feasibility constraints.
- August 20, 1998--This meeting was held as a preview to a Monmouth City Council meeting where alternatives for upgrading the existing northwest bypass were to be presented. Both freeway and expressway improvement options were shown and discussed.
- May 6, 1999--This meeting was held prior to the public meeting where the recommendation for the preferred alternative from Carman Road to U.S. Route 67 was to be presented to the public.

7.3.3 Public Meetings

Public meetings were held at key milestones during the project in order to convey information to the affected communities, solicit input, and answer questions. All meetings were held in an open house format with no formal presentations. Notification of the meetings was accomplished through paid advertisements in the Monmouth, Galesburg and Burlington, Iowa newspapers, as well as with press releases that were sent to the local media, and postcard notification to the project mail list. The project mail list was developed through public opinion surveys, public meetings, and letters or phone calls received by IDOT.

Comment forms were available at each meeting for attendees to respond with questions or concerns. IDOT responded in writing to all written comments from each meeting. Five public meetings have taken place to date.

7.3.3.1 September 10 and 11, 1996 Meetings

Two meetings were held, one in Monmouth and one in Biggsville. The purposes of the meetings were to introduce the project to the affected communities and present the goal of completing engineering and environmental planning for a four-lane divided roadway for U.S. Route 34 between Monmouth and Gulfport. The roadway type, freeway or expressway, had not yet been determined by the study team. Information available included aerial maps, maps of the approved 1970 corridor and the recommended modifications, explanation of a freeway versus an expressway, the planning process, and comment forms. Approximately 200 people attended these meetings and relayed the following comments/concerns:

- Safety concerns regarding the amount of truck traffic on the two-lane roadway and at intersections in Monmouth.
- Potential impacts to farming operations with a four-lane roadway including access to fields on both sides of the roadway and farm severances.
- Questions were asked on whether the new road would be a freeway or an expressway condition. Most people supported the expressway concept due to easier access for existing farming operations and traffic circulation.

7.3.3.2 April 28 and 29, 1997 Meetings

The second set of public meetings was held in Monmouth and Biggsville. The purpose of each meeting was to discuss two project recommendations. The first was a decision to upgrade the existing northwest Monmouth bypass in lieu of building a new southeast bypass. The type of upgrade, whether a freeway or an improved expressway, had not been determined by the time of meeting. The second recommendation was to proceed with an expressway concept from U.S. Route 67 west to Gulfport. Approximately 120 people attended these meetings, and relayed the following comments:

- There was considerable support for the expressway option from U.S. Route 67 to Gulfport.
- Concern for impacts to farming operations and farmland were reiterated.
- The business owners in Monmouth were concerned about impacts to their businesses with an upgraded roadway, such as access changes and acquisition of property.
- Many people were anxious to know where the road would be located and the schedule for improvements.

7.3.3.3 November 12, 1997 Meeting

The third public meeting was held only in Biggsville due to low turnout at the previous Monmouth meetings, and because the focus of the information that was to be presented involved U.S. Route 67 west to Gulfport. Preliminary alternatives were shown at this meeting, as well as reasons why some alternatives were being recommended for elimination. Over 200 people attended this meeting and had the following comments/concerns:

- Several questions were asked about access and how individual property owners would get on and off the new roadway.
- There was support for utilizing as much of the existing roadway as possible to minimize impacts to farmland.
- Safety concerns at the intersection of Carman Road and U.S. Route 34 were indicated. Many felt that an interchange was needed.
- Many property owners voiced concern about splitting their property by one of the alternatives.
- Concern was expressed about the options around the Union Community School and the need for good, safe access for students and teachers.
- Several farmers indicated concern about moving their equipment across the new roadway to farm on both sides.

7.3.3.4 November 10, 1998 Meeting

A fourth public meeting was held in Biggsville at the Union Community School to present the final options for improvements from Carman Road to U.S. Route 67. Only two areas, near the Union Community School and the connection to U.S. Route 67, had multiple options that remained for study. In addition, intersection improvement options for the existing expressway in Monmouth were also shown. Approximately 194 people attended the open house meeting. Comments included:

- Access issues and potential entrance modifications were discussed with business owners in Monmouth.
- Property owners were concerned about the alignment splitting their properties into several parcels.
- Many Monmouth residents indicated they were pleased with the expressway decision and the proposed improvements at the intersections.
- Comments were made about safety at Carman Road. A suggestion was made to put in a signal immediately.
- Concern was expressed that the interchange at Illinois Route 94 was shown as a potential interchange. They felt this area needed an interchange for safety reasons with school traffic.
- Access issues along the yellow alternate which is located south of existing U.S. Route 34 with a new interchange at Route 67 between Kirkwood and Monmouth were brought up by property owners in that area.
- Several people expressed their support for the purple alignment which is located along existing U.S. Route 34 and utilizes the existing interchange at Route 67 between Kirkwood and Monmouth because it would impact less cropland and it would use the existing interchange. A few homeowners who would be impacted by the purple alternative said they would be more than willing to sell their property to the State.
- Concern about potential impacts to businesses located along the north side of Union Community school were expressed.
- Several people commented that they expected to have a single recommendation at this meeting.

7.3.3.5 May 6, 1999 Meeting

A fifth public meeting was held in Biggsville at the Union Community School to present the recommended alternative from Carman Road to U.S. Route 67. Approximately 122 people attended the open house meeting. Comments included:

- Many meeting participants were concerned about impacts to their entrances for fields and homes as well as businesses. Particular mention was made at TR94, Gladstone junction, and other proposed road closures. Several requests were made for additional median crossings.
- Road Closure Issues--A Gladstone Township Commissioner indicated he did not want Bogus Hollow Road closed. He did not particularly like the proposed road closure at TR127 either. He seemed to be receptive to taking over jurisdiction of current U.S. Route 34 from Indian Mounds to an unnamed tributary of the Mississippi River (locally known as Lone Tree Creek) at the Bogus Hollow Creek structure.
- A comment was made about the difficulty of making the tight right turn onto the U.S. Route 34 interchange ramp
- A comment was made in favor of upgrading the existing expressway around Monmouth to a freeway condition.
- The public, on several occasions, asked for an approximate width of right-of-way for the proposed route location.

7.3.4 Small Group Meetings

A number of small group meetings were held with members of the community to discuss specific project issues. The intent of these meetings was to exchange information and have an in-depth discussion within a small group meeting format that focused on particular issues that were pertinent to the meeting attendees. The meetings included:

- Warren-Henderson County Farm Bureau, March 25, 1997;
- Monmouth City Council, May 18, 1998;
- Monmouth Business and Property Owners, May 27 and 28, 1998;
- Warren-Henderson County Economic Development, July 2, 1998;
- Monmouth Rotary Club, August 3, 1998;
- Monmouth Business Owners, August 20, 1998;
- Route 34 Coalition Hog Roast, 1996, 1997 and 1998;
- Agricultural Coordination Meeting, October 26, 1998;
- Greater Monmouth Area Chamber of Commerce
- Gullberg and Stevenson Meeting, April 19, 1999; and
- IDOA Meeting, April 16, 1999.

7.3.5 Project Newsletters

Four project newsletters (see Appendix G) were produced and distributed to the project mail list (approximately 526 people are on the mail list). The newsletters contained information about the progress of the study, upcoming meetings, results of previous public meetings, and upcoming project activities such as field surveys or the availability of project information.

Newsletters were sent out at project milestones such as upcoming public meetings or to present a project recommendation.